

**STUDY GUIDE**  
for  
**Playhouse on the Square's**  
**production of:**



**September 29th & 30th , 2015**

**Playhouse on the Square**  
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**Memphis, TN 38104**

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- A teacher can come to Playhouse on the Square and check out one of the scripts.
- If you read it at Playhouse, there is no deposit.
- If you prefer to take the script with you, there is a \$10 charge.
- If the script is brought back to Playhouse, your \$10 is refunded.

OR

- A teacher can have the script mailed to them. If we are given a credit card number, Playhouse will charge the teacher \$15, and the script will be mailed to them Priority.
- If the script is brought back to Playhouse, \$10 will be refunded.

## INTRODUCTION

Thornton Wilder's play *The Matchmaker* is a farce in the old-fashioned sense. It uses such time-honored conventions as characters hidden under tables and in closets, men disguised as women, a complex conspiracy to bring young lovers together, and a happy ending in which three couples are united with plans to marry. The traditional aspects of the play should come as no surprise: Wilder himself was the first to acknowledge the sources that it was based upon. The character of Dolly Levi came from French playwright Molière's comedy *L'avare, or The Miser*, from which Wilder lifted some scenes directly. A closer influence was Johann Nestroy's *Einen Jux will er sich Machen*, performed in Vienna in 1842. Wilder referred to his play as a "free adaptation" of Nestroy's, which itself was adapted from British playwright John Oxenham's 1835 comedy *A Day Well Spent*. Wilder's first adaptation was called *The Merchant of Yonkers*, which failed on Broadway in 1938, running for only twenty-eight performances. *The Matchmaker* was itself adapted as *Hello, Dolly!*, which began in 1963 and ran for years, ranking as one of Broadway's longest-running musicals.

In all of these permutations, the basic plot has been the same as it is in *The Matchmaker*. In Wilder's version, an irascible, penny-pinching store owner, Horace Vandergelder, refuses to let his niece marry the poor artist she loves, although he himself plans to remarry. Dolly Levi, the matchmaker of the title, pretends that she is helping Vandergelder find a suitable bride, but she actually schemes to marry him herself, and she works to help the young lovers gain his approval. Vandergelder's beleaguered clerk, who is longing for excitement, also meets the woman of his dreams, although she happens to be the one Vandergelder intends to marry. In the end, everyone is happy and just a little smarter.

Playbill from the original 1955 production of the play



# 1

# THE PLAY

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## SYNOPSIS

### Act 1

*The Matchmaker* is set in the 1880s and begins in the cluttered living room of Horace Vandergelder, a wealthy old widower living above his prosperous hay, feed, and provisions store in Yonkers, New York. His bags are packed, and he is being shaved by a barber. Ambrose Kemper, an artist, is trying to get Vandergelder to allow him to marry Vandergelder's niece, Ermengarde. Vandergelder does not approve because Ambrose does not make a steady income, and the old man is too practical to consider either love or the promise of future earnings as significant reasons to change his mind. Ambrose points out that Ermengarde is twenty-four and old enough to do what she wants. Vandergelder says that he is sending Ermengarde away to a secret place to prevent the wedding, but then his housekeeper, Gertrude, comes in and announces out loud the address where Ermengarde's luggage is being sent. Vandergelder sends for his chief clerk, Cornelius Hackl, and explains to him that he is going away for a few days to be married. He says that he is promoting the thirty-three-year-old Cornelius to the position of chief clerk, even though, as Cornelius tells the junior clerk later, it is a position he has held for several years already. When no other clerks are in the room, Malachi Stack enters with a letter of recommendation from a past associate. Vandergelder agrees to hire him and sends him away immediately to catch a train to New York City so that he can prepare for Vandergelder's arrival after his marriage. Vandergelder is out of the room when Dolly Levi arrives. She is an old friend of his late wife, a matchmaker who is supposed to be finding a suitable wife for Vandergelder. She hears Ermengarde and Ambrose complaining that he is obstructing their wedding plans, and she agrees to help them, arranging to meet them at a restaurant in New York that night. Vandergelder arrives and tells Mrs. Levi his plans

about a woman who is wealthy, socially connected, and interested in him, and so he agrees to put off proposing to Mrs. Molloy. Left alone, Cornelius complains to the other clerk, Barnaby Tucker, that they never get time off to go out and experience life. He goes downstairs to the store and heats some cans of tomatoes until they explode, creating a foul smell that forces them to close the store, and they take off to New York, planning to have an adventure.

### Act 2

In the hat shop that she owns, Irene Molloy tells her assistant, Minnie Fay, that she will marry Vandergelder if he asks, in order to get out of the hat business. She feels trapped by the reputation that milliners have, with her every move being watched by people who expect her to be a woman of low virtue. Minnie objects that Mrs. Molloy should not marry if she does not love Vandergelder. They are in the back room when Cornelius and Barnaby come into the shop to hide, having seen Vandergelder on the street. When the women enter, the two clerks pretend to be wealthy men who are shopping for a hat—actually, “five or six”—for a friend. Cornelius falls in love with Mrs. Molloy immediately.



Ken Farrell as Malachi Stark in Indiana Festival Theatre's 2013 production of the play.



Seeing Vandergelder and Mrs. Levi approaching the shop, Cornelius and Barnaby hide in a closet and under the table, respectively. Mrs. Molloy suspects what is going on and leads Vandergelder to the back room to give them a chance to escape, but Cornelius decides to stay so that he can get to know Mrs. Molloy. Dolly Levi finds out about their situation and decides to help them. When Vandergelder and Mrs. Molloy come back, the conversation turns to Cornelius. Mrs. Molloy is under the impression that he is wealthy, and Vandergelder says he is just a clerk. Mrs. Levi explains that Cornelius is actually a well-known socialite, a prankster who comes from a wealthy family and works at the shop in Yonkers to amuse himself. The clerks sneeze and are found out; Vandergelder walks out, indignant, taking Mrs. Levi with him. Mrs. Molloy, thinking that Cornelius really is wealthy, insists that he and Barnaby take Minnie and her to an expensive restaurant for dinner.

### Act 3

At the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant, Vandergelder plans to meet Mrs. Levi and the mysterious woman whom she said admires him. He sees Ermengarde and Ambrose enter. He pays Malachi and the cabdriver who brought them to abduct the young couple when they leave and take them to the house of Miss Van Huysen. The two clerks arrive with Mrs. Molloy and her assistant. As she orders food and champagne, Cornelius worries about how they will pay the bill at such an expensive restaurant. The waiter sets up another table and puts up a screen between the two, for privacy; at the other table he seats Vandergelder, who is waiting for his date. Malachi finds a wallet on the floor and, not seeing that it has dropped out of Vandergelder's pocket, takes it around the screen and gives it to Cornelius, whom he has never met. No longer worried about the bill, Cornelius confesses to Mrs. Molloy that he is not rich and is just a clerk. She suggests that they just have a good time. Mrs. Levi joins Vandergelder and explains that the woman she told him about has run away and gotten married. During their conversation, he discusses how difficult Mrs. Levi can be, and she pretends that he is flirting with her and hinting at marriage, in order to plant the idea in his head.

To get out of the restaurant without being seen by Vandergelder, Cornelius and Barnaby put on the ladies' coats and veils. Before leaving, they take time to dance. Vandergelder, dancing with Mrs. Levi,

bumps into Cornelius and recognizes him. He fires both clerks, and Mrs. Molloy breaks up with him. Ermengarde enters and faints, to be carried out by Ambrose. Mrs. Levi points out the sorry situation of Vandergelder's life: "Without niece—without clerks—without bride—and without your purse. Will you marry me now?" He still refuses.

### Act 4

The cab driver and Malachi arrive at Miss Van Huysen's house with Cornelius and Barnaby, who is still disguised as a woman; they have mistaken them for Ermengarde and Ambrose. Miss Van Huysen explains that she has no intention of interfering with young love as Vandergelder expects her to. The real Ermengarde and Ambrose show up. Expecting Miss Van Huysen to object to their relationship, they tell her that Ambrose is Cornelius Hackl. Dolly Levi arrives with Mrs. Molloy and Minnie. She pays off the cabdriver with money from Vandergelder's wallet, which Cornelius gave to her. When Vandergelder arrives, Mrs. Van Huysen insists that he let the young lovers marry. Everyone goes to the kitchen, and Dolly Levi, addressing her dead husband Ephraim, explains that she intends to marry Vandergelder in order to spread his money around, creating happiness. When Vandergelder comes back, he does in fact propose to Mrs. Levi. Barnaby comes in and says that the other two couples are going to marry, too, and Mrs. Levi has Barnaby, as the youngest member of the cast, give a final speech to the audience about the importance of having enough adventure in one's life.



From left, Mike Shara, Laura Condlin, Andrea Runge and Josh Epstein in Thornton Wilder's 1954 comedy "The Matchmaker," at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario.

# THE CHARACTERS

## **Horace Vandergelder:**

A tightwad, middle-aged merchant of Yonkers, New York, Vandergelder has forbidden the marriage of his niece, even though she is of legal age. However, he has hired a matchmaker to find a wife for himself.

## **Cornelius Hackl:**

One of Vandergelder's underpaid clerks, Cornelius decides it's time to break out of his boring lifestyle and seek some adventure of his own.

## **Barnaby Tucker:**

Another of Vandergelder's clerks, Barnaby is a bit younger than Hackl, but sets out with him in search of an adventure.

## **Malachi Stack:**

Frequently unemployed, Malachi is the newest member of Vandergelder's pool of clerks.

## **Ambrose Kemper:**

An artist who is courting Vandergelder's niece, Ambrose has run afoul of Vandergelder because he doesn't feel an artist can support a family.

## **Joe Scanlon:**

A barber

## **Rudolph:**

A waiter at the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant.

## **August:**

A waiter at the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant.

## **Mrs. Dolly Levi:**

A matchmaker, only one her many talents, Dolly was a friend of Vandergelder's late wife. She also has designs on Vandergelder for herself.

## **Miss Flora Van Huysen:**

A friend of Vandergelder's late wife.

## **Mrs. Irene Molloy:**

A New York City milliner, Mrs. Malloy has been set up as a prospective wife for Vandergelder.

## **Minnie Fay:**

Mrs. Malloy's assistant.

## **Ermengarde:**

Vandergelder's niece, Ermengarde doesn't do very well at making decisions for herself. She is, however, in love with Ambrose, whom her uncle doesn't want her to marry.

## **Gertrude:**

Vandergelder's outspoken house keeper.

## **Waiters**

## **Cabman**

## **Miss Van Huysen's Cook**

# Vocabulary from the Play

Impertinence: (Noun) Unmannerly intrusion or presumption; insolence

Apprentice: (Noun) A Person who works for another in order to learn a trade

Undertaker: (Noun) Funeral Director

Rostrum: (Noun) Any platform, stage, or the like, for public speaking

Millinery: (Noun) Women's hats and other articles made or sold by milliners

Overshoes: (Noun) A shoe or boot usually worn over another for protection in wet or cold weather, especially waterproof outer shoe.

Gumption: (Noun) Initiative; aggressiveness, resourcefulness

Congenial: (Adjective) Agreeable, suitable, or pleasing in nature or character

Decimated: (Verb) To destroy a great number or proportion of

Mussed: (Verb) To put into disorder; make messy; rumple

Grindstone: (Noun) A rotating solid stone wheel used for sharpening, shaping

Veranda: (Noun) A large, open porch, usually roofed and partly enclosed, as by a railing, often extending across the front and sides of a house

Menagerie: (Noun) A collection of wild or unusual animals, especially for exhibition

Superfluous: (Adjective) Being more than is sufficient or required; excessive

Exasperate: (Verb) to irritate or provoke to a high degree; annoy extremely

# 2

# BACKGROUND

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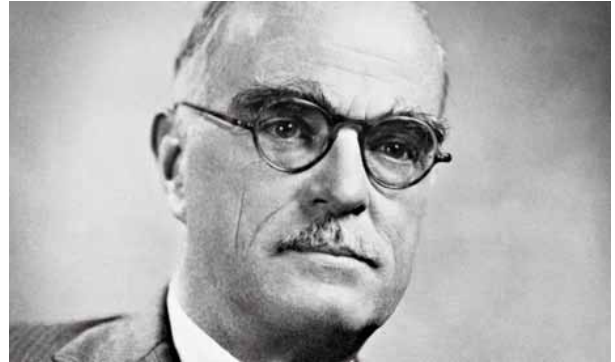
## THE PLAYWRIGHT

### Thornton Wilder

Thornton Wilder

Thornton Niven Wilder was born in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1897. The second of Amos Parker Wilder and Isabella Niven Wilder's five children, Wilder spent his childhood traveling back and forth to the Far East where his father was posted as the United States Consul General to Hong Kong and Shanghai. A strict Congregationalist with a Ph.D. in economics from Yale, Amos read to his children from the classics and insisted that they spend their summers working on farms. Wilder's mother was a cultured, educated woman who instilled a love of literature, drama, and languages in her children. She read widely, wrote poetry, and was actively involved in the cultural life of communities where they lived. She was the first woman elected to public office in Hamden, Connecticut. Thornton remembered her "like one of Shakespeare's girls -- a star danced and under it I was born."

The Wilder children were all highly educated and accomplished, as their father and mother expected. Thornton's older brother Amos was an acclaimed New Testament scholar and nationally ranked tennis player. His oldest sister Charlotte was an award-winning poet who suffered a nervous breakdown in 1941 and remained in institutions the rest of her life. His youngest sister, Janet Wilder Dakin, was a professor of biology and noted environmentalist. Of all the Wilder family members, however, Thornton was closest to his middle sister Isabel, herself the author



Thornton Wilder

of three successful novels and a member of the first graduating class of the Yale School of Drama (1928). She acted as his secretary, business manager, and literary adviser. After her parents' deaths, she and Thornton lived together in the family home in Hamden, Connecticut.

In 1915, Wilder finished high school in California and enrolled in Oberlin College, where he studied the Greek and Roman classics. When the family moved to New Haven, Connecticut, two years later, Wilder followed, enrolling in Yale University. His first full-length play, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, appeared in the 1920 Yale Literary Magazine, but was not produced until 1926. Turned down by the other services due to his poor eyesight, Wilder left school for eight months to serve as a corporal in the Coast Artillery Corps in World War I. He returned to complete his B.A. in 1920, and then proceeded to Rome, where he studied archaeology at the American Academy. That summer in Rome inspired his first novel, *The Cabala* (1926.) Wilder received his final degree, a master's in French literature from Princeton University in 1926, but retained his intellectual curiosity throughout his life, reading widely in English, French, and German and conversing in Italian and



Spanish. He went on to teach French at the Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, lecture on comparative literature at the University of Chicago, serve as a visiting professor at the University of Hawaii, and teach poetry at Harvard University. Even after he'd achieved publishing success, Wilder considered himself a teacher first and a writer second.

Wilder's breakthrough novel was *The Bridge Of San Luis Rey* (1927), an examination of the fate of five travelers who fall to their deaths from a bridge in 18th-century Peru. Seeking to discover meaning in the lives lost, a scholarly monk named Brother Juniper explores the lives of the five victims, an endeavor that leads to his own death at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition. The book earned Wilder his first Pulitzer Prize.

While living in Chicago, Wilder became close friends with fellow lecturer Gertrude Stein and her companion, Alice B. Toklas. In fact, Stein's novel *The Making of Americans* (1925) is said to have inspired Wilder's *Our Town* (1938). Tracing the childhood, courtship, marriage, and death of Emily Webb and George Gibbs, the play finds universal meaning in the ordinary lives lived in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. (The fictional town was based on Peterborough, New Hampshire, where Wilder spent summers at the MacDowell Colony.) A huge success on Broadway, *Our Town* earned Wilder his second Pulitzer, making him the only American author to win Pulitzer Prizes for both fiction and drama. Wilder himself took on the role of the Stage Manager for two weeks in the Broadway production and in summer stock productions in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. (In 1988, the play's 50th anniversary revival on Broadway earned the Tony Award for Best Revival; the 2003 Westport Country Playhouse revival would earn a Tony nomination for the same award.)

Before heading off to war, Wilder turned his dramatic attentions from stage to cinema, working on Alfred Hitchcock's classic thriller *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), and a play based on Franz Kafka's works, *The Emporium*. During World War II, Wilder enlisted in the army, rising to lieutenant colonel in the Air Force and earning the Legion of Merit and Bronze Star. After his discharge, Wilder completed *The Ides Of March* (1948), a historical novel about Julius Caesar that was his most experimental work.

Inspired (some critics said too closely) by James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, *The Skin Of Our Teeth* (1943) depicted five thousand years in the lives of George and Maggie Antrobus, a suburban New Jersey couple, who with their children and maid Sabina struggle through flood, famine, ice, and war only to begin again. Premiering in 1942 with Tallulah Bankhead, Fredric March, and Florence Eldridge in the central roles, the play was Wilder's critical response to the American entry into World War II. Although many famously exited the theatre after the first act, the play earned Wilder his third Pulitzer.

In the 1950s, Wilder wrote the plays *The Wreck Of The 5:25* (1957), *Bernice* (1957), and *Alcestiad*, based on Euripides's *Alcestis*. He revised his *The Merchant Of Yonkers* (1938) under the new title *The Matchmaker* (1954), which was made into a film with Shirley Booth, Anthony Perkins and Shirley MacLaine in 1958. In 1964 the play was turned into the Broadway musical *Hello, Dolly!* starring Carol Channing. A critical and popular success, the musical went on to win 10 Tony Awards and ensured Wilder's financial security for life.

In addition to Pulitzers and Tonys, Wilder received many literary awards for his work, including the American Academy of Arts and Letters Gold Medal for Fiction (1952), the first National Medal for Literature (1962), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1963), and the National Book Committee's Medal for Literature (1965). His last two novels were *The Eighth Day* (1967),

which won the National Book Award, and *Theophilus North* (1973), which is considered autobiographical.

Wilder is believed to have had one or two affairs with younger men, but he never publicly addressed his sexuality and the subject of sexuality was largely absent from his work. Instead, renowned for his sociability and energy, he focused on his countless friends, which included Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather and Montgomery Clift. On December 7, 1975, Wilder died at the age of 78 in Hamden, Connecticut, where he had lived for many years with his devoted sister Isabel.

#### Novels

*The Cabala* (1926)

*The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927)

*Heaven's My Destination* (1934)

*The Eighth Day* (1967)

*Theophilus North* (1973)

#### Plays

*An Angel That Troubled Waters and Other Plays* (1928)

*The Woman of Andros* (1930)

*Our Town* (1938)

*The Merchant of Yonkers* (1938)

*The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942)

*The Matchmaker* (1954)

*Plays for Bleeker Street* (1962)

*Hello Dolly!* (1964)

#### Screenplay

*Shadow of Doubt* (1943) (collaboration)

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

## The Gilded Age

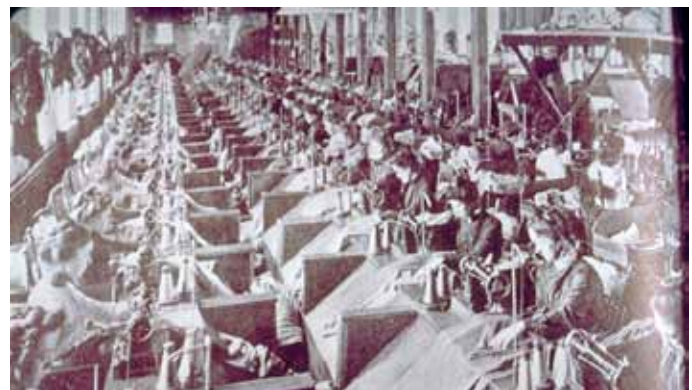
The phrase “Gilded Age” comes from the title of an 1873 book by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner. The book was an exposé of corruption in politics and business after the end of the Civil War in 1865, but the phrase is used today to describe the American situation throughout the last third of the century.

Economically, the era was notable for the rise of industry. The population was in the process of shifting from rural to urban, and the growth of cities provided the workforce to create larger production facilities. Railroads expanded across the country—the transcontinental railroad was completed at Promontory, Utah, in 1869—making it possible to move materials for production and to ship manufactured products nearly anywhere on the continent. From 1870 to 1900, the use of bituminous coal, which powered industry, rose tenfold, and the use of rolled iron and steel increased to twelve times what it had been. The country’s gross national product multiplied six times over in those years. Out of this situation arose the businessmen who made giant fortunes from this economic growth, usually by controlling an entire industry, as John D. Rockefeller controlled the oil industry, Andrew Carnegie controlled steel, and J.P. Morgan controlled banking. At the same time that a few individuals were amassing incredible fortunes, there was terrible poverty and illness among the common laborers who worked in the factories.

Although *The Matchmaker* takes place among shops and not factories, the economic situation of the times can still be seen in the disparity between the characters’ finances. Horace Vandergelder, a store owner, comes off as a miserly tyrant who carries stacks of twenty dollar bills in his wallet, while his clerks, who are forced to work from six in the morning to nine at night six days a week, have to scrounge for train money. And while class differences will always be present, this play portrays the restaurant as being a particularly unsafe place for those of the lower classes. By contemporary standards, Vandergelder is a heartless, petty tyrant, and the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant is too snobby, but the 1880s were a time of extreme wealth and poverty.



Transcontinental railroad construction



Factory Laborers at work during Gilded period

# Nostalgia

The time when *The Matchmaker* was produced was a particularly trying time in American history. After the tumultuous decades of the 1930s, which saw the worst economic depression in the nation's history, and the 1940s, which were defined by the second world war, the 1950s were peaceful and prosperous. Still, even as external conflict was lacking, there were social forces that served as continuous reminders of life in the modern world.

One defining characteristic was the awareness of the potential for nuclear destruction. World War II ended after the United States dropped the first nuclear bomb ever used on August 5, 1945, killing almost 130,000 people with one blast. The second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. In the 1950s, people were aware of the devastation of the bombs and uncertain of the ability of politicians to refrain from using them. People at that time practiced disaster drills to prepare for nuclear attacks. Homeowners built bomb shelters and stocked them with food, preparing for the time, that could come any day, when civilization would be wiped away in an instant.

The other defining element of the 1950s was the Cold War. During World War II, the Soviet Union and America were allies in the fight against German aggression. After the war, though, their different political ideologies led them to be fierce competitors. The Soviet Union pursued a policy of spreading communism around the globe, leading to an American foreign policy based on containing communism. There were hearings, led by Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, aimed at identifying communists who had infiltrated the U.S. government and the entertainment industry in order to spread communist ideas. (McCarthy was later censured by the Senate, and his name has come to be associated with systematized fear mongering.) The United States became involved in wars in South Korea and Vietnam with the goal of stopping the growth of communism in those places.

In a time of constant worry about sudden annihilation, of suspicion that treacherous spies were trying to overthrow the government from within and to control American minds, *The Matchmaker* offered reassuring, light entertainment. It was set in a time in the nation's history when there were no great disturbances, no war or imminent danger. Racial issues are not approached in the play, and genders are equal, with a female-owned shop in New York balancing a male-owned shop in Yonkers. Unlike comedies with contemporary settings, the historical setting of *The Matchmaker* allowed audiences to forget the problems of the day and to bask in the warm feeling of nostalgia for a simpler time.



# CURRICULUM TIES

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## **Grades 9-12 Theatre Standards**

Content Standard 6.0: Theatrical Presentation

6.1 Examine dramatic production as a synthesis of all the arts.

Content Standard 7.0: Scene Comprehension

7.1 Respond to a variety of theatrical experiences as an effort to interpret, intensify, and ennoble human experience.

7.2 Expand the depth and scope of aesthetic judgment by experiencing informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions and theatre of diverse styles, periods, and genres.

7.3 Understand the role of the audience in creating a theatrical experience.

Content Standard 8.0: Context

8.2 Discover and explore historical motifs and themes.

## **Grades 9-12 English Standards**

Content Standard 2.0: Reading

2.08 Determine the effectiveness of figurative language in various texts.

2.09 Determine the impact of literary elements on texts.

2.10 Analyze persuasive devices found in various texts.



# 4

## A CLOSER LOOK

### BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

1. Go over the plot synopsis, historical context, and background information from the guide with your students.
2. Discuss with your students the etiquette of being an audience member at a live theatrical performance. Items for discussion: don't talk during the play, turn off cellphones & electronic devices, appropriate responses, no chewing gum, going to the bathroom before the performance, etc.

### THEMES

#### Gender Roles

Wilder uses the different expectations that society has for males and females to twist the comic situation of *The Matchmaker* into a tighter knot than the events would otherwise permit. The first and most obvious example of this is the way in which Horace Vandergelder attempts to control his niece's life, dictating whom she may or may not marry, and the way in which Ermengarde accepts his authority. At the same time that he is trying to control Ermengarde's love life, Vandergelder is also planning on marrying someone—he is not very concerned about whom—in order to get an efficient housekeeper. Keeping house is a task for women, he explains, but the women who do it for hire do not do it well. "In order to run a house well," he tells the audience, "a woman must have the feeling she owns it. Marriage is a bribe to make a housekeeper think she's a householder." Throughout the play, Vandergelder is presented as an example of prejudice and ignorance, so blind to reality that he cannot see how his clerks think of him or how Dolly Levi is manipulating him into marriage. His view of gender roles is therefore not necessarily one that audiences are expected to accept.

A more realistic view of gender roles is the one held by Irene Molloy. She owns her own business, a hat shop in New York, and so has

financial independence. Still, she wants to get out of the hat business because of the stereotype that "all millineresses are suspected of being wicked women." She is not able to go to public events because people will think that her behavior is improper for a lady. This knowledge of unwritten social conventions and of how people would punish her if she broke them is more telling of gender roles in this society than Vandergelder's skewed notions. Even so, the play probably gives its female characters more freedom than they would actually have enjoyed in the 1880s, reflecting more about the time when it was written than the time when it is set.

#### Money

One of the keys to the social situation in *The Matchmaker* is the uneven way in which wealth is distributed among the characters. Vandergelder is clearly the wealthiest character, and how he spends money helps audiences gauge what he considers important. He usually pays fifteen cents for a haircut, but for the occasion of proposing to Mrs. Molloy he is willing to go up to fifty cents. (The barber, Joe Scanlon, will not accept more than three times his regular fee for something as improper as dying a man's hair.) The wages he pays his workers for ninety hours of work per week leave them with about three dollars each in their pockets. Yet Vandergelder is willing to pay the Cabman fifteen dollars to

help him keep Ermengarde and Ambrose apart. He carries a purse that is stuffed full of twenty dollar bills, and he is only willing to consider the adventure of remarrying because he has half a million dollars in the bank.

The plot revolves around Vandergelder's insistence on holding onto his money. His objection to Ambrose is based solely on Ambrose's poor financial prospects and has nothing to do with the young man's character. Ermengarde, on the other hand, thinks nothing about money whatsoever. Dolly Levi represents a compromise between the two: though she says that she wants Vandergelder's fortune, her affection for him is clear. His theory is that money should not be spent, and hers is that it should. Once Vandergelder learns to trust Dolly, he lets his money go, and once he does that he can have open relationships with his niece and clerks.

## Love

Like many comedies, *The Matchmaker* takes advantage of the mysteries of love in order to put its characters into complex situations. Vandergelder may be cheap and rude, but it is when he denies having ever heard of such a thing as a broken heart that audiences know he will get his comeuppance, just as surely as they know that Ermengarde, who thinks of nothing but love, will be satisfied in the end. Vandergelder fools himself into thinking that he is interested in women for all sorts of reasons that are not love. He tells himself that he wants a housekeeper and falls for Dolly Levi's idealized portrait of a woman who is a great cook, wealthy, infatuated with him, and a third his age. In the end, though, he cannot keep himself from falling for Dolly, even though she is none of the things that he was looking for.

The play would end in the second act if Cornelius and Barnaby simply hid out at Mrs. Molloy's hat shop for a while and then went away. What keeps them engaged in the action, and therefore involved with the main characters, is that Cornelius falls instantly, hopelessly in love with Mrs. Molloy. A realistic play would not have a character lose control of himself so quickly after their

first meeting, but then, a realistic play is not trying to make audiences laugh. Without faith in love at first sight, the various plot threads of *The Matchmaker* would spin out in different directions. Without faith in a love that is more powerful than sound thinking, the play would leave Horace Vandergelder unpunished for his stinginess and his plotting, which would not make it a very satisfactory comedy at all.

## Adventure

When the play is over, and all of its extraordinary events are through, Dolly Levi has the youngest character tell the moral of the play to the audience. The speech that Barnaby gives talks about the need for adventure in life. In the most direct sense, this is the lesson that he and Cornelius have learned throughout the play: they were reluctant about leaving their posts as clerks at the store in Yonkers and end up happier for having interrupted their routine. In a broader sense, it is the lesson that nearly all of the characters learn. Vandergelder, certainly, starts the play thinking only of safe prospects and ends it happier because things that he would not have wanted have had their effect on him. Irene Molloy, who has been waiting for a rich man to take her from the job she hates, falls in love instead, which she apparently finds better. Minnie goes to the kind of restaurant that she would never have thought existed; Barnaby receives his first kiss; Ermengarde and Ambrose find a solution to the problems that kept them from getting married. All of these characters are better off at the end because they went through a frightening situation that was out of their control and were willing to enter into an adventure for its own sake.

The only character who does not really have an adventure is Dolly Levi. She is, as she explains to Ambrose early in the play, "a woman who arranges things." Throughout the course of *The Matchmaker*, she is not someone who has adventures but someone who causes adventure to happen to others. She is, however, open to the unexpected; in her speech in act IV, she describes how she was shut away from life after her husband's death until one night when "I decided to rejoin the human race." Because of Vandergelder's overbearing personality, the end of the play suggests that Dolly Levi's adventure is just beginning.

# Discussion and Essay Topics

## Question 1:

Find a character on television who reminds you of Horace Vandergelder. Explain what the two have in common and what you think each would do if put in the other's place.

## Question 2:

Gender roles play an integral role in this play. Does Ermengarde's obedience and relationship to Horace have any resemblance to modern day "Father/daughter" relationships? Why or what not?

## Question 3:

Does *The Matchmaker* as a whole promote, or discourage the idea of Gender Equality? Explain your opinion.

## Essay Topics:

A marriage is often thought of as a beginning, though it often comes as a happy ending in comedies. Write a short story that shows what life is like for one of this play's couples a year after they are married.

Instead of matchmakers, the modern world has dating services. What kind of business would Dolly Levi consider herself to be in today? Design an ad that she might run in the newspaper, on the Internet, or on television to promote her services.

# ACTIVITY

## ART OPENING!

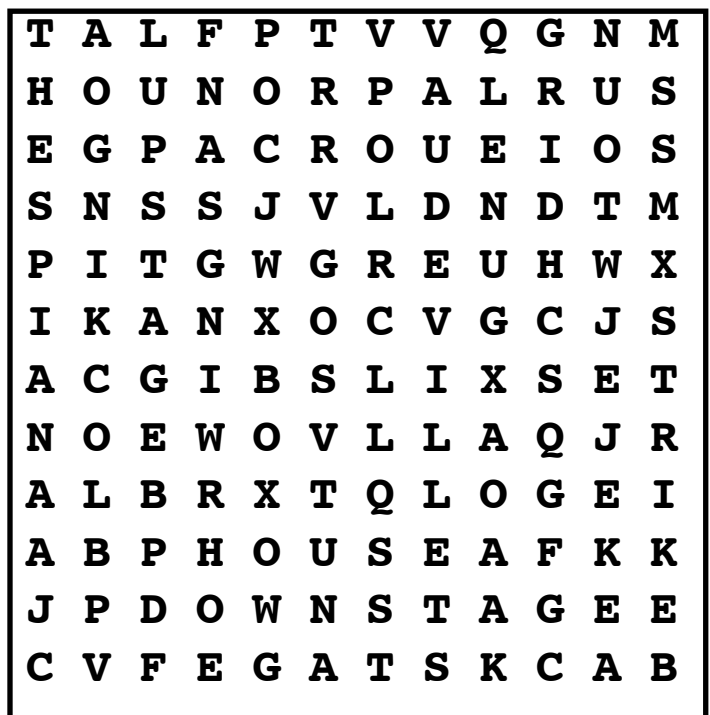
USING ANY FORM OF MEDIA, CREATE A PIECE OF ART **AMBROSE** MIGHT HAVE MADE BASED ON WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT HIM FROM THE TEXT. WRITE A BRIEF BLURB EXPLAINING WHY **AMBROSE** CREATED THIS PARTICULAR WORK OF ART.



Paul Herbig as Ambrose at Asolo Repertory Theatre (2010).

# Word Search Activity

Search the letter grid below and circle the theatre terms listed.  
How many can you find?



APRON	FOOTLIGHTS	PROSCENIUM
BACKSTAGE	GEL	SET
BLOCKING	GRID	STRIKE
BORDER	HOUSE	THESPIAN
DOWNSTAGE	LOGE	UPSTAGE
FLAT	PIT	VAUDEVILLE
FOLLOWSPOT	PRODUCER	WINGS

# 5

# THE THEATRE



In the summer of 1965, Jackie Nichols was a rising senior at Overton High School. He teamed up with fellow students to form a troupe of actors to perform shows in churches and civic centers. They called themselves The Circuit Players, and for the next four years, they performed a variety of musicals and straight plays wherever they could.

Circuit Playhouse, Inc. was born on November 20, 1969 near the University of Memphis when the company rented a former home that had been converted to a ballet academy. In 1971, the space was sold, and the company relocated to 1947 Poplar across from Overton Park. When Circuit Playhouse, Inc. moved to this larger building, it rented an adjacent building to be used for a costume shop and a new performance space known as Workshop Theatre. It was a venue for new, original, and one-act plays. Two years later, another adjacent building was used to create Theatre II; a space for producing little known plays. This helped to spearhead a widespread revitalization of Midtown Memphis. For the next several years, the three theatres operated on an annual budget of approximately \$30,000 with no paid staff.

Recognition of the organization's well-established position in the community came at this time with the first funding grant from the Greater Memphis Arts Council.

In 1975, Circuit Playhouse, Inc. acquired a building in Overton Square in Midtown Memphis. With \$30,000 provided by Overton Square Investors for renovation, and with increased funding from the Greater Memphis Arts Council, Playhouse on the Square was born. It was an offspring of Circuit Playhouse, Inc. which continued to produce the kind of adventurous theatre its audience had come to expect. Playhouse on the Square opened on November 12, 1975 with a production of *Godspell*. It also had a resident company of professional actors and a paid staff. The first season was graced with the performances of many fine actors including Larry Riley and Michael Jeter, who would later achieve notable careers in New York and Hollywood.

In 1979, Circuit Playhouse, Inc. bought and moved to the former Guild Movie theatre at 1705 Poplar. It was a 10,000 square foot building and included space for a larger costume shop, its first dedicated scene shop, rehearsal space, improved dressing facilities, and storage for costumes and props. The two theatres

continued to pursue their own directions. The Circuit Playhouse initiated the MidSouth Playwright's Contest, offered a Foreign Film Series, and staged Off-Broadway and experimental works. Playhouse on the Square began to offer weekday matinees for school groups in addition to its regular season.

In 1981, Playhouse on the Square initiated the Intern Program. The program was begun to enable emerging theatre artists to explore every avenue of the profession and apply their education in the real world. Today it includes twelve college graduates hired to assist in all phases of production.

By 1985, Playhouse on the Square was again feeling growing pains. The student matinee series had outgrown the theatre's capacity, and seating for many productions was limited. The Memphian Movie Theatre just down the street (a favorite after-hours screening facility for Elvis) was available. Circuit Playhouse, Inc. purchased the building and solicited three-year pledges from individuals and corporations and was able to complete a \$150,000 renovation of the building.

1986 saw the inception of the Playhouse on the Square's Theatre for Youth program, which expanded into a full-scale Summer Youth Conservatory, TnT (Teens in Theatre), a touring program, and a full season of school matinees. In 1990, Playhouse on the Square instituted the city's first independent Theatre School with theatre classes for children, teens, and adults. From the five classes offered during the first season, the school has expanded to a total of twenty courses.

Having been concerned for some time that arts events were beyond the financial means of the city's poorest citizens, Jackie Nichols suggested to the Arts Council that they arrange some way of making art, theatre, music, and dance available to the disadvantaged. In January 1990, Arts Access came into being making free tickets to arts events available to those on food stamps. In addition, Jackie Nichols instituted the Pay What You Can program in 1991. Every show produced at both The Circuit Playhouse





and Playhouse on the Square has a Pay What You Can night, ensuring that those who cannot afford the full price of a ticket will not be denied the pleasures of an evening at the theatre.

In 1992, Playhouse on the Square acquired an adjoining building adding 6,000 square feet in which to build a new scene shop, a large multi-purpose room with bar, a meeting room, and wheelchair-accessible restrooms.

To finance this expansion and ensure the financial stability of the theatres into the 21st century, Jackie spearheaded the Silver Challenge, a \$350,000 fund-raising effort. Again, the Memphis community responded by producing the needed revenue in a matter of months.

In 1994, construction began on Theatre-Works, a building near Playhouse on the Square which was built to house a variety of small performance groups unable to afford quarters of their own. The following year saw the inception of a program that has had national impact in the theatre world—the Unified Professional Theatre Auditions. In February 1995, Playhouse on the Square hosted twenty-five theatres and two hundred actors from around the country. Since then, the growth has been phenomenal. Nearly 90 theatres and over one thousand actors and production personnel attended in 2015.

With a view to ensuring a new generation of theatre patrons, Jackie Nichols launched the After School Acting Program (ASAP) in 1997. Several months were spent developing this program for 7-12 year-olds. Churches, schools, and community centers all over the metropolitan area host sites for troupes of children for the twice-weekly activity, which, under the guidance of a director, creates an original theatrical piece to be performed at a festival at the end of each semester.

In December 1997, longtime supporters of the theatre donated to Circuit Playhouse, Inc. a building adjacent to The Circuit Playhouse. This building, now known as the Jeanne and Henry Varnell Theatre Arts Education Building, was refurbished to house all of our Theatre For Youth programs. In order to refurbish the building, Circuit Playhouse, Inc. created the 21st Century Challenge: Building for Generations, a capital funds drive that raised \$600,000.

The growth in artistic capability and maturity of the theatres has resulted in an expanded awareness and appreciation in

the local community and beyond. This is reflected in the numerous Memphis theatre awards presented to Circuit Playhouse, Inc. in recent years. In December 1990, Circuit Playhouse, Inc. was honored by the Tennessee Arts Commission with the Governor's Award in the Arts. In October 1993, Jackie Nichols was awarded the Gordon Holl Award for Outstanding Arts Administration at the Governor's Conference on the Arts, and in June 1999, Jackie Nichols received the Rotary Club Community Service Award. Circuit Playhouse, Inc. celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2004.

In 2005, Playhouse on the Square received an unrestricted \$25,000 Stanford Group Financial Award in partnership with the Greater Memphis Arts Council recognizing fiscal stewardship of the organization.

In 2004 the Board of Trustees recognized that the Playhouse on the Square's current renovated 1920s movie theatre was inadequate for the full array of artistic capabilities and talent available and expected by audiences. They undertook a fifteen million-dollar capital campaign that has led to the completion of our new Playhouse on the Square at 66 S Cooper. The new theatre is complete with all the modern stage machinery necessary to present the very best in theatre. The new facility will have rehearsal space, administrative offices, and costume and scenic facilities. Pippin, the first show in the new theater opened January 29, 2009.

## OUR MISSION

To produce a challenging and diverse repertoire of theatrical work that speaks to the intelligence, the soul, and the imagination of the Memphis community;

To provide a nurturing artistic home for actors, directors, designers, and staff in which they can practice their craft and share their talent; and

To make all of our productions available through access, outreach, and educational activities to everyone in the community regardless of financial circumstances.

Since 1969, more than 5,500 people have acted, taught, staffed, ushered, "teched," and struggled to bring forth the 777 shows produced at our theatres.

With the continued generous support of our audience members, our sponsors, and our board; and with the dedication of our actors, technicians, and staff, we can celebrate 40 years of great theater and make our next forty years even more exciting.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Playhouse on the Square** is proud to be Memphis' Professional Resident Theatre Company. That means that the artists you encounter in our theatre, onstage and off, are professionals.

Nearly all of the actors, the designers, technicians, and administrators do this as a full-time job. People interview from all over the country to be hired for these coveted career opportunities. Nearly all of the artists have been to college, trained, and earned degrees specializing in their field.

Together, we work very hard to produce season after season of quality work; serving our community with art, as well as education and outreach programs.

Most importantly, this is our home. We are honored to open our doors to you and share the excitement of the performing arts. To show respect for our home, we ask that teachers prepare students for their theatrical experience, aided by the use of our free study guides.

The skills and guidelines herein enhance students' cultural literacy. We encourage educators to integrate these principles into further study throughout their curriculum. Thank you for supporting the arts!

# ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION

## Creative Team

No musical would be possible without the imagination and inspiration of its **authors**. Many times, the idea for a show grows from an existing book, play, article, or movie. Other times, authors write musicals from an original idea or concept. Once an idea is developed, **composers** and **lyricists** begin to write the songs. The music needs to not only fit the overall tone and pace of the musical, but also contain lyrics that help the audience understand the story and its characters. The **choreographer** designs the dance sequences for the performers. The dances are intricate movements that allow the performers to express the meaning of each song. The **director** works with all of them to help guide the overall artistic vision of the show.

## The Cast

The director works to cast both the **principle performers** and the **ensemble** or **chorus** members. Each performer must have a well-trained singing voice, acting skills, the ability to dance, and fit the look of his/her character. These elements are all evaluated during the audition process. Actors are asked to bring a **headshot** as well as perform two songs, one **uptempo** and one **ballad**, as well as one or more monologues. Once the actors are chosen for the principal roles and for the ensemble, they become the cast, and begin working with the director during the rehearsal process.

## The Rehearsal

The cast will do an initial **readthrough** of the script, without singing or dancing, followed by additional practices with the **rehearsal pianist**. The **music director** teaches and rehearses the music with the orchestra and is responsible for the musical aspect of the production. The **dance captain**, sometimes together with the **choreographer**, teaches and rehearses the dance sequences with the performers. During rehearsals, the director coaches the actors' reading of the lines and emotions and also gives them their **blocking**, line by line, scene by scene. Next, the cast does a **sitzprobe**, where they sit and sing with the orchestra before incorporating any staging, scenery, costumes, or props. Eventually, the cast does a **wanderprobe**, where they run through the show, including movements and dancing, while the orchestra plays. The **technical rehearsal** is when the full cast and crew walk through the entire show, ensuring every light cue, sound effect, microphone, etc. works as planned. This rehearsal is mainly for the tech staff. The cast and crew will also go through a **dress rehearsal** many times to bring all the different elements (costumes, music, dance, lights, sound) together.

**Crew:** The **set designer** creates the locale and period in which the musical occurs. While some sets are very simple and focus the audience's attention on the show itself, some are lavish and extravagant providing visual appeal. The **master carpenter** is responsible for building the actual set. The **lighting designer** decides where the lighting instruments should go, how they should be colored, and which ones should be on at any particular time. The **master electrician** implements the lighting designer's work and makes sure the lights are set properly and safely. The **property (props) master** is in charge of obtaining or making and maintaining all props used in the show. He or she also sets the props in their proper places before the show begins. The **stage manager** is responsible for the overall integrity of a production. He or she assists the director, and **"calls the show,"** making sure each performance runs as smoothly as possible.

**Sound:** The **sound designer** plans the layout of all sound playback and equipment for the show and adjusts the pitch, volume, duration, and overall quality of the music to meet each specific scene's needs. The **sound operator** executes the sound designer's plans and handles the mixing equipment for the show. Music and sound must fit the context in which they are used. The adjustments are made using the **soundboard**.

**Costumes and Make-up:** The **costume designer** first researches the setting of the musical. Costumes must be appropriate for the time period and culture of the show, beautiful and elaborately designed, while also practical enough for movement and dance. He or she then decides which styles and fabrics to use, and draws the costumes in **renderings**. Through costume fittings, the costumes are adjusted to fit each individual performer. During dress rehearsals and performances, actors have **dressers** to help put on and/or change their costumes. The **make-up artist** is responsible for applying cosmetics to each performer's face and body to increase visibility, enhance certain features, and modify the actor's look to resemble his or her character. In addition to make-up, certain roles call for a specific hairstyle. The **wig master/mistress** obtains the wigs, styles and shapes them, and helps the actors put them on.

# Q: What Makes Theatre Magical?

## A: The Audience!

Going to see a production at the theatre is an exciting experience! You will be watching live actors perform onstage. This makes each performance very special. No two shows are alike, due to the spontaneity of live performance.

Each time you come to the theatre, it is like making a promise to come inside the world of the play we have made for you. We agree to create a theatrical world for you to visit, and you agree to step inside it for awhile. That agreement is the last step in the process of making a play happen!

So, when you walk into a theatre, you can feel a sense of impending discovery. Something important is about to happen. It's exciting to be in the room. That stage holds the secret of what is about to come to life as you find the seats reserved for you. Sometimes, it is so thrilling you want to get wiggly, laugh, and shout. But remember that once the play begins, everybody in the theatre has a responsibility. Everybody is part of the play - including you.

Theatre is an art form that depends on both the artists and the audience. As members of the audience, **you play an important part** in the success of a theatrical performance. Audience reaction strongly affects the actors.

They certainly don't want a passive audience; they thrive on the audience's response - the laughter and the applause. When appropriate, such reactions "fuel the fire" - but that response must be in co-operation with the action onstage, or it is off-putting and distracting for the performers and other audience members.

Students accustomed to watching television in their homes or attending movies are used to eating snacks, moving around, getting in and out of their seats, or sharing comments aloud during a show. Movies and TV shows are not affected by the audience, **but theatre performances are!** Students may not be aware of how disturbing such behaviors can be in live theatre. As a courtesy, prepare students for their theatre experience. Discuss behaviors that are problematic and why they are a problem.

You are connected with the other people in the audience as well as the ones onstage. They can **see** you, **hear** you, and **feel** you; just as you see, hear, and feel them. Your laughter, your responses, your attention, your imagination, and most especially your energy are important. They are a real part of the performance, and the wonderful truth is that the play can be better because of YOU!

- *Theatre is entertaining, as much as it is educational, mirroring society in all its complexity artistically through conflict and resolution.*
- *Audiences are able to observe and celebrate society's heroes who overcome life's obstacles to a prosperous or detrimental end.*
- *Audiences enjoy live theatre because it provides an escape from the outside world. Within the walls of the theatre, moral dilemmas are more easily grasped, and its characters can be scrutinized according to society's mores.*
- *Delving into moral dilemmas elicits an emotional response from the audience for any one of the particular characters, thus encouraging the audience to critically become aware of their own prejudices and suppositions of human behavior.*



**The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee 2009, Playhouse on the Square**

# A GLOSSARY OF THEATRICAL TERMS

## A

**Act** (v) to perform or play a role; (n) a division of a drama

**Action** the core of a theatrical piece; the sense of forward movement created by a sense of time and/or the physical and psychological motivations of characters

**Articulation** clear pronunciation of words

## B

**Blocking** the pattern actors follow in moving onstage, usually determined by the director.

**Box Office** where ticket sales are handled, usually located in the theatre's lobby

## C

**Cast** (v) to choose the actors to play specific roles in a play; (n) the group of actors who take the roles in a play

**Catharsis** an emotional purification or relief (Greek)

**Character** one of the people who figures in a play; a part played by an actor

**Choreographer** an artist who designs (choreographs) dances for the stage

**Climax** the turning point in a plot when conflict comes to an emotional crest

**Conflict** struggle between opposing ideas, interests, or forces in a play. The existence of conflict, either external (between two or more characters) or internal (within one character), is central to drama.

**Costume** any clothing an actor wears onstage for a performance

**Costume Designer** the person who decides what the actors will wear, he/she designs costumes to build or chooses costumes to rent, borrow, or buy for a production

**Cue** a final line or action that signals an actor to begin the next speech

**Curtain call** the return of the cast to the stage after the end of the performance, when the actors acknowledge applause

## D

**Denouement** the final resolution of the conflict in a plot

**Dialect** language features specific to the speech of a particular region

**Dialogue** the lines of the play spoken by the actors in character

**Director** the person who oversees the entire production

**Downstage** the part of the stage closest to the audience

**Dramatic conflict** the conflict in which the main character in a play engages. There are four types of dramatic conflict: 1) person vs. person; 2) person vs. society; 3) person vs. self; 4) person vs. nature/fate

## E

**Ensemble** the interaction and blending of the efforts of the many artists involved in a

theatrical production

**Exposition** the beginning of a plot that provides important background information

## F

**Falling action** the series of events following the climax of a plot

**Fight director** a movement and combat specialist who choreographs both armed and unarmed fight scenes and stunts onstage

**Fourth wall** an imaginary wall between the audience and actors in a representational play

## G

**Gesture** an expressive movement of the body or limbs

## H

**House** the auditorium or seating of a theatre

## I

**Improvise** to speak or to act without a script

**Inciting incident** the event that sets in motion the action of the plot

## L

**Lighting Designer** the person who develops a lighting concept and design for a production, he/she oversees installation and operation of lighting for the production

## M

**Monologue** a story, speech, or scene performed by one actor alone

**Motivation** a character's reason for doing or saying things

## O

**Objective** a character's goal or intention

**Obstacle** something that stands between a character and his/her ability to meet an objective or achieve a goal

**Open** to keep the face and front of the body visible to the audience as much as possible

## P

**Pantomime** to act without words through facial expression and gesture

**Performance** a representation before an audience; entertainment

**Playwright** a person who writes plays

**Plot** the sequence of events; the structure of a play

**Producer** the person or company who oversees the business details of a theatrical production

**Project** 1) to make your voice fill the performing space; 2) to cast an image or patterned light onto a screen or other surface

**Property or Prop** anything that an actor handles onstage as well as furniture and other items used to enhance the set

**Proscenium stage** performance space in

which the audience views the action as if through a picture frame

**Protagonist** the main character of a play; the character with which the audience identifies most strongly

## R

**Rising action** the middle part of a plot, consisting of complications and discoveries that create conflict

**Role** a part in a play that is written by the playwright; the basis of an actor's characterization

## S

**Scene** the basic structural element of a play; each scene deals with a significant crisis or confrontation

**Scenery** onstage decoration to help establish the time and place of a play

**Script** the text of a play

**Set** the onstage physical space and its structures in which the actors perform

**Set Designer** the person who develops the design and concept of the set

**Sound Designer** the person who determines the kinds of sound needed for a production, recorded or live

**Stage Manager** director's technical liaison backstage during rehearsals and performances

**Stage Picture** the succession of tableaux created by a director through blocking

**Strike** 1) to remove something from the stage; 2) to take down the set

**Symbol** a concrete image used to represent a concept or idea

## T

**Tableau** a silent and motionless depiction of a scene, often from a picture

**Theatre** 1) the imitation/representation of life, performed for other people; 2) the place that is the setting for dramatic performances

**Theme** underlying meaning of a literary work

**Thespian** an actor (named after the first actor, "Thespis")

**Tragedy** a play that ends in defeat or death of the main character

## U

**Understudy** an actor who learns the part of another actor playing a major role, able to replace the original actor in case of emergency

**Upstage** 1) (n) the stage area away from the audience; 2) (v) to stand upstage of another actor on a proscenium stage, forcing the downstage actor to turn away from the audience; 3) (v) to steal the focus of the scene

## W

**Wings** the sides of a stage just outside the scenery, unseen by the audience



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